DISPATCH FEBRUARY 18, 2020

# TRUMP'S ALL-OUT EFFORT TO MAKE YOU FORGET THE OUTCOME OF THE MUELLER INVESTIGATION

President Donald Trump is desperate to make himself the victim. After being impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives and earning bipartisan support for conviction in the Senate, President Donald Trump has retreated to his familiar false claims about the Russia investigation: that it was biased, that it was a waste of time and money, and that it exonerated him. He is, as *The Washington Post*'s Philip Rucker wrote, trying to "rewrite history" to portray himself—and Russia—as targets of an illegal "witch hunt" rather than as complicit in one of the worst attacks on American democracy in history.

As with the rest of the Trump team's arguments, their attacks on the Mueller investigation continue to be both irrelevant to the charges at hand and outright false. The Mueller investigation not only resulted in 37 indictments, including eight convictions, seven of which came via guilty pleas; it also uncovered both collusion and obstruction of justice. It is vital that the public understand the truth.

Trump and his attorney general William Barr's efforts to derail the sentencing of Roger Stone show how far they are willing to go to distract from and cover up Trump's personal involvement in collusion in 2016.

**Trump and Barr aren't just interfering to protect Stone—they're doing it because Stone's indictment and the Mueller report show that Stone was acting at the direct behest of high-ranking members of the Trump campaign, including Trump himself.**

- The Trump campaign's CEO, Steve Bannon, and deputy campaign chairman, Rick Gates, understood full well that they were colluding. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's latest sentencing memo: "Both Gates and Bannon believed that Stone was providing them with non-public information about WikiLeaks' plans" to release emails the Russian government had stolen from the Clinton campaign, and "Bannon viewed Stone as the Trump campaign's access point to WikiLeaks."
- Stone was, in other words, acting on Trump's personal order to his inner circle to "get the emails" they knew Russia had stolen from their political opponents.
- Trump and Barr leapt into action after prosecutors initially recommended that Stone serve seven to nine years in prison for lying about and attempting to cover up his work as a backchannel between the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks.
- After Trump criticized the sentencing recommendation on Twitter, calling it "horrible and

very unfair," the DOJ backtracked, saying that it would be pursuing a lesser sentence for Stone.

- Barr claims this decision was made before Trump's complaint but has offered no supporting evidence. Meanwhile, Trump personally congratulated Barr for "taking charge of a case that was totally out of control and perhaps should not have even been brought."
- Since the DOJ's announcement, all four prosecutors who were part of Mueller's team and were involved in Stone's prosecution have filed to withdraw from the case.

**Stone's backchannel was part of a larger strategy of collusion.**

- In April 2016, Trump campaign adviser George Papadopoulos learned from a Kremlin-connected professor that Russia had stolen Clinton-related emails and planned to release them anonymously to help Trump.
- Trump's campaign chairman, Paul Manafort, and deputy, Gates, shared polling data and campaign strategy with a suspected Russian operative on the understanding that he would pass the information along to oligarchs close to Putin, including one to whom Manafort allegedly owed millions of dollars.
- Manafort, Donald Trump Jr., and Jared Kushner met with Russian operatives with the explicit understanding that they were offering to help the campaign "as part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."
- Trump's first national security adviser, Michael Flynn, secretly coordinated with the Russian ambassador to undermine sanctions placed on Russia as punishment for its interference in the 2016 election. (That may explain why Barr has reportedly intervened there as well, stepping in to reduce Flynn's recommended sentence and appointing an outside investigator to "review" the case against Flynn, who is now trying to withdraw his guilty plea.)
- Despite clear knowledge that Russia was attacking American democracy, Trump's team had at least 272 known contacts and 38 known meetings with Russia-linked operatives during the 2016 campaign and transition.

**Trump and his team obstructed justice to cover up their crimes.**

- Stone, Papadopoulos, Manafort, Flynn, and Michael Cohen have all been convicted of or pleaded guilty to lying to investigators about their roles in collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia—although Flynn is now attempting to withdraw his guilty plea.
- Trump stonewalled Mueller's efforts to interview him for almost two years, despite repeatedly saying that he was willing to do so, only submitting written answers that Mueller later testified contradicted other evidence he had gathered in the investigation.
- The Mueller report reveals that Trump himself was involved in at least 10 efforts to obstruct justice, ranging from firing FBI Director James Comey and repeatedly attempting to fire Mueller to dangling pardons to stop witnesses from cooperating with investigators.
  - After the report came out, more than 1,000 former federal prosecutors signed on to an open letter asserting that if Trump were not president, he likely would have been indicted for obstruction of justice.
- Since the report was released, Trump has continued obstructing investigators. Even before

> the House's impeachment investigation began, Trump promised that he would be "fighting all the subpoenas" the House sent for testimony and documents from White House officials.

**Trump is attempting to rewrite the history of the Mueller investigation, perpetuating a myth of victimhood.**

Trump's defenders spent the impeachment scandal deploying a disinformation campaign to discredit the Russia investigation and portray the president as the victim of a deep-state conspiracy. Now, they've come full circle, using their self-declared exoneration from the Mueller report—a narrative that his team fabricated—to justify Trump's continued attacks on American democracy, from demanding investigations into the debunked "CrowdStrike" conspiracy theory to pressuring the DOJ to produce an anti-Mueller report he can use "as a cudgel in his reelection campaign."

It is vital that the American public understand that Mueller's report was not a failure; it was the single most damning document ever produced about a sitting U.S. president.